

## **Marketing and the Cultural Production of Celebrity in the Era of Media Convergence**

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### **Abstract**

Celebrity endorsement research in the marketing literature has been over-reliant on an exogenous notion of celebrity as something produced outside of the marketing system, from which meanings can be transferred to brands within the marketing system. In fact, marketing has been deeply implicated in the constitution of celebrity since the dawn of Western consumer culture in the early part of the twentieth century. In the era of media convergence there is a pressing need for researchers in marketing to re-evaluate the meta-assumptions around celebrity and its relation to marketing in the light of marketing's culturally constitutive role.

### **Keywords**

Celebrity. Endorsement. Convergence. Branding. Social Media.

### **Bios**

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### **Introduction**

*Celebrity, marketing, and consumer culture*

Astute marketers have recognised the commercial value of the celebrated individual since the emergence of print media. Showbusiness led the way in the profitable art of crafting public personas, and impresarios from P.T. Barnum to Simon Cowell leveraged the public's passion for prominent performers to make serious money from frivolous entertainment. Indeed, the extraordinary success of the Hollywood movie industry since the 1920s was built on a system that produced stars to order in response to the demands not of screenplay writers or directors, but of fans (Barbas, 2001), so it would be an oversimplification to suggest that media personnel control the process without hindrance. Since the 1950s, the celebration of being known simply for being

known (Boorstin, 1992) has migrated from entertainment into many less likely spheres including politics, sport, literature, music, business, journalism, art, academia, and even cookery (Brownlie and Hower, 2011). The proliferation of the celebrated in contemporary consumer culture might be explained by an unaccountable increase in personages of excellence, but is far more likely to be driven, at least in part, by motives not unconnected to marketing and commercial interest.

As we will see in examples later in the paper, celebrity is commercially indispensable for lending brands an emotional resonance and extending the potential market into new segments. Such is the centrality of celebrity for attracting audiences to media brands and, concomitantly, for indirectly enabling every kind of mediated promotion, some cultural theorists have suggested that the facilitation of commerce is the *principal function* of the famous (Turner, 2004). Certainly, as popular journalism becomes the only economically viable form of news (Wolf, 2003), the famous name or face is a powerful aid in building online traffic and generating advertising revenue for media brands. What is more, celebrities can be seen as fundamental to Western consumer culture and central to the re-invention of global capitalism (Lasch and Lury 2007; Kerrigan et al., 2011). Celebrity is a branch of branding in itself (Schroeder, 2005) but it is not just about making money: since the 1960s, celebrity has even taken over the political arena as ‘personalities’ take precedence over policies. Errant showbusiness celebrities are often criticised as bad role models when they are imitated by the less privileged. Celebrity, in fact, carries a social and economic influence out of all proportion to the trivial achievements of some who find themselves included in this peculiar pantheon. The very insubstantiality of celebrity hints at the marketing imperative lying behind it. There are, clearly, vested interests involved as brands compete for the kind of attention that celebrities can deliver at a stroke, or at least at a social media click.

As we note above, celebrity and marketing have never been far apart, and many of today’s aspects of celebrity are not entirely new. From Alexander The Great to David Beckham, there has been a suspicion that some noted figures were also talented self-publicists, and the discomfort readers might feel in having those two names juxtaposed in the same sentence reflects the persistent tensions that circulate around the legitimacy of celebrity, fame, renown, however it is conceived. Cultural theorists differ on the extent to which contemporary celebrity is driven from the bottom up by consumers (e.g. Cashmore, 2006) or imposed by dominant institutions within the media world (Hesmondhalgh, 2005). They also differ on whether the social consequences of the media obsession with celebrity are partially positive, or wholly negative (Rojek, 2012). There is broad agreement, though, that celebrity in contemporary culture is qualitatively and quantitatively different from that of previous eras. As all media channels converge around the internet and old media are integrated with social media (Jenkins, 2008) to mobilise an entertainment-driven economy (Wolf, 2003), the business of celebrity has assumed a cultural intensity, cyclical rapidity, and economic imperative never seen before. Most significantly, celebrity in the industrially developed West has become democratised (Driessens, 2013) to an extent previously unknown, in two senses. Firstly, the means to become well-known are now available to millions, through, for example, reality TV shows, social media, video editing and sharing, weblogs and 24-hour news and entertainment via mobile devices. Secondly, through the participative consumer mechanisms of social media (Jenkins, 2008), consumers are able to elect celebrities more quickly and efficiently than ever before. The ostensible democratisation, and perhaps the proletarianisation, of celebrity, though, has not resulted in a lessening of its cultural or economic importance. Far from it.

In this paper, then, we attempt to contribute a perspective that is new in three respects. Firstly, we re-frame celebrity endorsement as a culturally constituted effect of marketing rather than an association between marketing and non-marketing culture. Secondly, we bring a cultural perspective that highlights the media performance of celebrity, thus up-dating the conceptualisation of celebrity for the convergent media era. Thirdly, we bring a marketing perspective, broadly conceived, as a unifying element of the production of celebrity that is lacking in both the disparate cultural

studies treatments of celebrity, and in the marketing literature on celebrity endorsement.

Below, we briefly review a small but representative selection of celebrity endorsement literature in order to highlight what we term a key ‘meta-assumption’ of the field, namely that celebrity is exogenous to the marketing system and its symbolic values are imported through endorsement and other contractual brand relationships. We do not maintain that all celebrity endorsement research in marketing ignores the cultural dimension- rather, we observe that the ontological implications of the cultural constitution of celebrity are often neglected, resulting in an under-theorised relation between the celebrity and the brand. We then discuss the emergence of the celebrity in consumer culture from the early twentieth century to the present day convergence era in order to further highlight the neglected role of marketing in the cultural production of celebrity. Finally, we conclude by discussing some implications of a more fully culturally contextualised theorisation of celebrity, for marketing research and practice.

### **The meta-assumptions of celebrity endorsement research**

The circulation of celebrity in the convergence era, then, is thoroughly commodified and fully integrated with the machinery of marketing, yet the role of marketing in the production of celebrity remains under-explored in the celebrity endorsement literature. Our purpose here is not to engage with the detail of particular celebrity endorsement research studies, but to address a governing ontological meta-assumption that hovers over the field. This is the assumption that celebrity is exogenous to the marketing system, and that benefits flow in a linear fashion from the celebrity into the marketing system to benefit the brand, and from there, to the consumer.

McCracken’s (1989) meaning-transfer meta-model of celebrity (see also McCracken, 1986) has not been unchallenged and yet its broad thesis retains an implicit presence in celebrity endorsement research studies that seek to measure the influence of celebrities on consumer attitudes to the brand. The model was designed to improve upon the source credibility and source attractiveness models by acknowledging the symbolic and socio-cultural character of the notion of celebrity. However, we suggest that the way it is typically interpreted in research studies tends to reify the idea of celebrity, to overplay the linearity of meaning-transfer from celebrity to brand, and to ignore the role of the marketing system itself in the production of celebrity.

Under the meaning-transfer model, the economic force of the endorsement is assumed to rest on the consumer’s perception of the credibility of the endorser and their ‘fit’ or degree of ‘match’ with the brand values (Erdogan, 1999; Kamins and Gupta, 1994). The conventional logic of celebrity endorsement holds that the celebrity must be ‘aligned’ with the sponsor or product to be endorsed, so that there is a perceived coherence between the two. Without this alignment, the endorsement is said to appear incongruent to consumers, and negative attitudes may result (Aaker, 2004). In this way, celebrity endorsement is seen to

“...back up other elements in the marketing mix such as product design, branding, packaging, pricing, and place decisions (distribution channels and physical distribution) in order to attempt to create positive effects in the minds of consumers” (Erdogan, 1999, p. 291).

The key assumption is that the celebrity acquires positive associations through success in an exogenous field of endeavour before becoming linked through advertising and PR to the brand, creating a current along which congruent forms of likeability flow from the celebrity to the brand and on to the consumer who enlists the associated meanings into their own identity projects (Tom et al., 1992). This transfer is often, though not always, conceived as uni-directional, and in either direction is subject to the perceived match-up of values and attributes between celebrity and brand (Buil et al., 2009).

Over three decades this meta-assumption has given rise to a plethora of research studies that implicitly set celebrity outside the realm of marketing in order to conceptualise and measure the effect of endorsements on consumer perceptions of credibility or brand fit (a small selection of representative examples include Hung, 2014; Pradhan et al., 2014; Spry et al., 2011; Jin and Phua, 2014; Silvera and Oustad, 2004). The celebrity is assumed to be logically and ontologically prior to the effect, and the phenomenon of reverse benefits flowing from the brand to the celebrity is rarely considered (one exception being Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010). A fuller understanding of the reciprocity of effects in the constitution of the celebrity/brand requires a stronger articulation of the fluid and boundary-spanning nature of contemporary celebrity in marketing research.

### **The constitution of celebrity in twentieth century consumer culture**

#### *Conceptualising celebrity*

For the purpose of this paper, we use the terms celebrity, fame and renown almost inter-changeably to refer to individuals who, for whatever reason, attain widespread public recognition amongst consumers, who include, but are by no means limited to, fans (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2012). We suggest that the distinction between earned fame and undeserved celebrity (Boorstin, 1992) may be of continued debate but is not necessarily useful in an analysis of how celebrity plays out as a market-driven media performance. Neither is it necessarily useful to mark a distinction between the old famous and the new famous. It is tempting, but problematic, to assert that celebrity today has less cultural integrity than it did in earlier times. High-achieving athletes, academics, politicians and others with substantive claims to fame could argue that they are not merely known for being known (Boorstin, 1992) but for their achievement and skill, unlike many early twentieth century movie stars who had a supposedly unique and charismatic ‘personality’ crafted for them by the studios (Gamson, 1994). In the convergent era, though, the performative aspects of celebrity become the key elements in driving consumption, rendering celebrity a tautology for marketing purposes.

The tension in the notion of celebrity between those who are deserving of renown, who serendipitously acquire fame, and those who are their own best publicist can be seen in many famous figures from Julius Caesar to William Shakespeare and beyond to Buffalo Bill, George Washington, Salvadore Dali, David Hockney, and David Beckham. Boorstin (1992) distinguishes between earned fame and ascribed celebrity, while Rojek (2012) refers to achieved, ascribed and celestoid celebrity. Clearly, for celebrity to be achieved it must also be ascribed, since achievement in any sphere requires the acknowledgement of peers before it can migrate outwards, so it is not necessarily easy to disentangle achievement from ascription. Celestoid celebrity refers to the ephemeral fame achieved by reality TV stars and the subjects of tabloid sensation. Celestoids may often be astute and intuitive PR operators who are complicit in their own manipulation, but it can hardly be doubted that they are outputs of the media system, as well as inputs.

The tension between achieved, ascribed and celestoid celebrity plays around a fourth category, the aristocratic theory (Gamson, 1994) that holds that personal greatness is innate, perhaps by virtue of a family name, or, in a later variation promoted by the Hollywood movie industry, by virtue of unique charisma, ‘personality’ or glamour that sets an individual apart from the ordinary simply for who they are: a ‘star’. All four elements, achieved, ascribed, celestoid and aristocratic celebrity, can be seen to be in inter-play around some celebrities as their prestige migrates from their original field of expertise, if they had one, to many other audiences, lending them a fluid quality that opens up their personal brand to many possible iterations and interpretations, David Beckham (Cashmore and Parker, 2003) being a prime example, discussed below.

#### *The disintermediation and democratisation of the production of celebrity*

The technological advances that made possible the circulation of visual images in

print media mid-way through the nineteenth century meant that prominent individuals could now be recognised and, in effect, used to enhance the appeal of news stories to sell print publications. Later, moving pictures were an even more powerful medium through which to connect the public with events and personalities far beyond their immediate experience. Half a century after Barnum excited press and public with his special brand of mendacious ballyhoo (Brown and Hackley, 2012), Hollywood adopted a somewhat different style of dark PR. Once the studios, and the artists, had realised that named actors drove sales of theatre tickets, and of anything else the stars used or promoted (Barbas, 2001), a network of publicity agents crafted actors' public images to fit the movie roles and genres they promoted. As fans grew less credulous toward the PR strategies of the movie industry, the relationship between consumers and media production became more complex. Fans pitched ideas and actively elected stars by voting with their theatre tickets. The movie business learned to listen carefully to its most influential consumers. In effect, the Hollywood celebrity production process had become disintermediated: the fans had prised control from the PR agents, movie journalists and studio publicists more than seventy years before the appearance of social media. Of course, the machinery of publicity remained opaque to all but the movie cognoscenti, but these Über fans numbered in their millions. They were tenacious in digging out the details of the stars' real lives, as opposed to the 'reel' lives constructed for them by the studios (Barbas, 2001).

The aristocratic model of celebrity as something innate in the charm or personality of the star (Gamson, 1994) and promoted through carefully crafted PR stories gave way in time, then, to more intrusive stories of stars' personal lives (Barbas, 2001). Indeed, intimate personal revelations, rather than (usually invented) PR stories, became the chief currency of entertainment celebrity by the 1960s, precipitated, according to Cashmore (2006), by the paparazzi pursuit of the scandalous liaisons of 1950s movie stars Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, and consummated as a self-conscious media strategy in Madonna's commercially aware manipulation of her own media image when she granted entertainment journalists unprecedented access to her private life in the 1980s. The aristocratic model of celebrity, if not entirely abandoned, was now spliced with the idea that stars had personal weaknesses, trials and misfortunes that could be sensationalised to drive the consumption of gossip magazines and other popular media vehicles. In other words, the stars were exaggerated versions of us, with more intense pleasures and more acute pains, supposedly. A dual sociological function is thus fulfilled by celebrity. It represents and embodies ideals of individuality as identity resources, and, it shapes and controls mass consumer tastes (Hesmondhalgh, 2005).

Long before Taylor and Burton's real-life soap opera, less salacious stories of the star at home and at leisure had become common magazine fare, creating a new marketing opportunity since consumers wanted to consume and display the same products the stars used. Through their assumed wealth and privilege, early movie stars were portrayed as experts in consumption (Barbas, 2001) and, hence, acted as sources of cultural capital for consumers who were able to mimic, in a small way, the elegance and discernment of the privileged lifestyle by wearing similar clothing styles, getting a similar hairstyle, or even by having a similar home or car to the stars. The extraordinary power of movies to generate compelling emotional responses in viewers became a key source of the new mobility of culture, as new values, new ideas, and new ways of talking, looking and behaving were disseminated to mass audiences through movies and print media (Boorstin, 1992). Entertainment consumers of every hue, from knowledgeable fans to casual movie-goers, were implicated in the machinery of stardom through their consumer behaviour long before the technology of social media enabled a far wider and deeper engagement with entertainment, brands and information to create a thoroughgoing participatory consumer culture (Jenkins, 2008).

#### *Convergence, celebrity and marketing*

The convergence of media channels through the digitisation of communication has connected market segments and provided a powerful space for intertextually connecting brands (Powell, 2013). The old, sepia, analogue world of meaning-transfer

has been condensed by mediatisation and convergence into a symbolic hall of mirrors in which meanings can circulate with lightening speed from a few hand-held devices. In this paper we refer to convergence as, broadly, the instant inter-connectedness of all media via the internet, accessed by millions on hand-held mobile devices. Old media and new are linked in the sense that print publications, radio and TV are increasingly constituted as media brands online, with easy sharing of stories via social media. As Jenkins (2008) emphasises, marketing and the profit motive drive convergence as changes in the consumption of media and communication, the fragmentation of media audiences and the rapid development of new media brands combine to push all media onto mobile-friendly digital formats.

Under convergence, an affective economy (Jenkins, 2008) emerges in which fans' entertainment preferences are leveraged for commercial gain and brands seek to engage with and exploit participatory consumer culture by eliciting emotional and creative responses from consumers. Celebrity is a key driver of this marketing activity for the influence it wields over styles, values and aspirations. As Gabler (1998) comments,

"Not only are celebrities the protagonists of our news, subjects of our daily discourse and the repositories of our values, but they have also embedded themselves so deeply in our consciousness that many individuals profess feeling closer to, and more passionate about, them than about their own primary relationships" (p. 7).

Celebrities have become part of the movie called life, as Gabler (1998) puts it, and as consumers we all have walk-on parts. Arguably, the aestheticisation of our everyday lives (Featherstone, 1991) is deeply facilitated when our worlds appear to be visually similar to the lives of celebrities we view on TV and in the movies, because we use the same brands, wear similar clothes, adopt a similar hairstyle or tattoo, drink the same beer or drive the same brand of car. It is difficult to sum up the consumer-celebrity relationship as simply a para-social (Horton and Wohl, 1956) or a projective one. As consumers we are highly susceptible to the influence of celebrities without necessarily imagining or aspiring to a relationship with one, and only the most candid fans would concede that their consumption choices are made to mimic a particular star. There is, though, a sense that celebrities occupy the same cultural space as ourselves that is heightened through social media. Consumers can enter the quotidian realm of the celeb via Twitter, for example, as if they were hanging out together at a virtual Mall (Banister and Cocker, 2013). In some cases, inter-action via social media can graduate to non-mediated social contact through attendance at live performances, personal communications or invited events (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2012). If visual media and then movies created a sense of intimacy between consumers and stars, convergence has taken it a step further to collapse the psychic distance between celebrity, and nonentity.

Celebri-marketing lends itself well to the narrative-based marketing of the convergence era. Brands, even for soft drinks or cars, are now storytelling operations that seek iterative engagement with consumers who adapt, develop, and sometimes subvert corporate branding activities. For example, *Coca Cola's Content 2020* initiative is explicitly about weaving collaborative brand stories into consumer consciousness, while car brands such as *Jaguar* and *BMW* have got into the movie making business, rather than using the money to buy more conventional advertising (Hackley, 2013). It is well-documented that, under convergence, marketing activity has seen a tangible shift, measured in adspend, from advertising to non-advertising categories, especially digital, and from promotion to content, storytelling, touchpoints and lovemarks. Celebrities lend brand stories a biographical force.

On the one hand, the dominance of celebrity-driven media representations might be seen as the consummation of the idea of a linked and unified culture industry (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002) pumping out low-grade, crowd-sourced consumer entertainment to fund the capitalist machine. On the other, the extent and variety of consumer engagement in the participatory consumer culture evinces a liberatory (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) climate in which consumers are empowered in ways that can,

on occasion, be fully materialised, not least when individuals with little talent and no resources achieve fame, wealth, and influence, such as reality stars or TV talent-show contestants. Of course, these are products of the media system (Hesmondalgh, 2005; Hackley, Brown and Hackley, 2012), but they are also active agents in that system. As we have noted, celebrity produced endogenously from within the marketing system pre-dates convergence, but, we suggest, convergence provides a veritable petri dish of opportunity for the multiplication and replication of celebrity to serve marketing needs.

### **Marketing and the celebrity cultural production process**

It would be sweeping to place all celebrity in the same homogeneous category as far as brand relationships go. Some contemporary 'A' list celebrities, such as actors like Anthony Hopkins, Jodie Foster or the late Philip Seymour Hoffman, have largely eschewed the brand spokesperson thing to protect their privacy and enable them to focus on their art, but the further down the alphabet one goes the more eager 'B', 'C' and 'Z' list celebrities seem to be to *Tweet* and *Facebook* their enthusiasm for any brand that will pay them. Indeed, one suspects some celebrities need their brand endorsements more than the brands need them. Some, like Coleen Rooney, who was improbably turned into a celebrity by grateful paparazzi who used her to brighten up the photographs they had to take of grumpy husband, soccer player Wayne, have even got into trouble for excessive sponsored Tweeting to her million + followers (Lowe, 2013). Colleen, who grew up around the corner from Wayne in Croxteth, Liverpool, took to the sponsored world of celebrity like a footballer's wife to Gucci handbags and regularly offers up her 'girl next door' advice on fashion, lifestyle and family matters, dispensing her celebrity gold dust as brand ambassador for *Littlewoods*, the catalogue shopping outfit, and for *Tesco* the retailer. She has also fronted columns for *Closer* and *OK!* magazines, and hosted her own TV show alongside the inevitable exercise DVD, bestselling autobiography and clothes brand. The marketing heft of celebrity is sometimes most striking in the newly minted celestoid, created by, for and through the marketing system as a tautologous vehicle for endorsements, publicity and promotion. Colleen Rooney's celebrity status owes as much to her husband's misbehaviour as to his sporting skills: her name became widely known when Wayne Rooney was the subject of salacious stories in a 2010 tabloid sex scandal.

The idea that symbolic values can flow from brand to endorser is not only a phenomenon of social media. From the early days of moving pictures, many movie stars were deeply entangled in commercial relationships. Some, such as Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford, owed much of their appeal to the publicity they acquired advertising major brands of the time such as *Camel* and *Pompeian Beauty Products* in the days before the studios had twigged that star names sell theatre seats. Early fan magazines encouraged fans to think of brands as "stars" (Barbas, 2001, p. 80) to deepen the sense of linkage between movie stars, brands, and consumption. A 1933 movie called *What Price Hollywood?* even articulated the branded lifestyle-to-star trajectory of fame in its plot. The protagonist, one Mary Evans, played by Constance Bennett, was a café waitress who studied the stars' styles in fan magazines, bought the dress, the lipstick, the stockings, and was duly discovered for her chic appearance and elevated into stardom herself (Barbas, 2001). Most fans are fully aware that copying the stars will not result in such a transformation, but they find the game of mimesis fun to play nonetheless. The transition from celestoid to celebrity, then, is by no means unique to the era of convergence, but convergence has placed the levers of the cultural production process in the hands of consumers.

While some celebrities turn their back on brands and others seem to use the brand to leverage their own celebrity (how many readers had forgotten all about underground 1960s pop icon Iggy Pop before he took an endorsement fee from insurance company Swiftcover?), it would be remiss to ignore the phenomenon of the anti-heroic celebrity, the individual who wins notoriety rather than fame yet still emerges with credit in the bank of PR. Consider boorish American football star Richard Sherman, of whom no-one beyond the Seattle Seahawks fanbase had heard before his ill-considered post-game rant on live TV in early 2014 when he mocked his losing opponent and claimed that he, Sherman, was the best cornerback in football. The clip

of Sherman's tirade went viral and he subsequently found himself invited on to prime time national news shows as a leading item to discuss sport, race and being American. Agents queued up to commission Sherman's, previously, carefully ignored thoughts for magazine features, TV interviews and more. All this, and the foul-mouthed spleen that gained him such media notoriety elicited all of one solitary viewer complaint out of the scores of millions of Americans watching the game (Eaton, 2014). Meanwhile, back in the usually more politically correct world of UK media, revelations about TV cook Nigella Lawson's drug habit and financial extravagance seem to have done little harm to her celebrity cachet to date, against the backdrop of her divorce from an abusive husband (Dutta, 2013). Celebrity misbehaviour, as we see in further examples below, is often a key component of the celebrity cultural production process.

The production of celebrity was greatly accelerated in the era of the Hollywood star system, with important input from fans as noted by Barbas (2001). Subsequently, the emergence of TV 'reality' shows and the growth of showbusiness gossip media since the 1970s and 80s further democratised the celebrification process (Rojek, 2012). The mediatisation (Driessens, 2013) of the developed world that began with the technology of the printed image now reaches into every second of every day via smartphones and mobile devices. The *performance* of celebrity has become part of the daily practice of millions of consumers who upload images, videos, comment and 'statuses' to social media and receive approval ratings in the form of views or 'likes', and, hence the idiom of celebrity as a media performance has become deeply inculcated in consumer culture. Aspiring self-promoters can deploy their own social media strategies to achieve, as opposed to merely mimicking, celebrity. For example, Canadian teen pop sensation Justin Bieber used *YouTube* as his audition reel before achieving global domination, and he has been followed by countless others. Scores of unknowns have launched careers as celebrity authors, journalists, style leaders and public speakers simply through the social media buzz created by their blogging (Dunlop, 2014). The acquisition of celebrity by individuals without the initial support of the cultural production system may be greatly facilitated by social media but, as we note, it is not new. For example, Louella Parsons became a famous, and notorious figure by writing about film stars in self-published pamphlets before becoming the most powerful critic in Hollywood, and her success pre-dated recent film and style bloggers who have won wider celebrity, by some 90 years (Barbas, 2001). The difference under convergence is that what began as a nominal process of democratisation has become universal suffrage. Ordinary consumers, especially young ones who have grown up immersed in social media, are, to an extent, defined in terms of the idiom of celebrity.

### **Fluid celebrity and celebri-marketing**

In contrast to the sequential model of celebrity endorsement in which the cultural status of the celebrity is logically prior to the endorsement, celebri-marketing in the era of convergence uses the symbolism of celebrity to *constitute* the celebrity brand in a mutually reinforcing cycle. Rather than a transfer of meaning, there seems to be a mutual constitution of meaning. This can also be seen where minor celebrities leverage the PR of being appointed by a prestigious brand to increase *their own* celebrity, while the brands win both ways because they get a cut-price ambassador whom they know will be elevated into the realms of major celebrity by association with the brand. For example, in 2010, *L'Oreal* appointed a relatively unknown actress as brand spokesperson (Hoyer, 2013). 'Major brand hires unknown ambassador/spokesperson' is in itself a PR story that was, predictably, widely published. Having said that, the tactic backfired on *L'Oreal* when the girl-in-the-crowd they hired for a major campaign on the strength of her photograph going viral was later pictured with big game animals she'd hunted. The girl was summarily dropped from her role (Tadao, 2014). As examples like Kate Moss, Nigella Lawson and Richard Sherman illustrate, though, Brendan Behan's counterintuitive axiom that there is no such thing as bad publicity (except, Behan added, your own obituary) is by no means without substance when it comes to the celebrification process under convergence.

The reciprocity of celebrity endorsement does not, though, require digital media as a



condition. Some brands have talent-spotted celebrities at an early stage in their celebrification. For example, when *Nike* signed up Michael Jordan in 1984, Jordan was by no means the iconic sporting hero he was later to become (McCallum, 2012). The same could be said of their later deal with LeBron James (Cashmore, 2006). In an even more clairvoyant piece of sports branding, a Bavarian shoemaker named Adolf, later to found the *Adidas* brand, persuaded Jesse Owens to wear Dassler Brothers track shoes before the 1936 Berlin Olympics. After Owens won four gold medals while Hitler glowered from the stands, Adi Dassler, for it was he, reportedly had to explain his endorsement strategy to the Gestapo in several 3 AM visits from the leather-coated fiends. These examples illustrate that the celebrity-endorser relation can be a good deal more fluid than a linear transfer, and convergence has greatly increased the circulation and velocity of fluid celebrity.

Celebrities have the quality of transcending and bridging market segments. The celebrity fan base and market segments often intersect like a series of Venn diagrams, offering the vast expansion potential of overlapping demographics. Conventional wisdom in branding holds that extending brand strategies across new markets and new audiences carries risks (Aaker, 2004), principally the risk of confusing consumers by diluting the brand positioning, but these risks seem to be at least partly ameliorated through the connection with celebrity. We suggest that the powerful currency of celebrity in brand marketing rests partly on the mobility it can confer on brand positioning across disparate media channels and incongruent market segments. Celebrities have become nodes connecting and materialising marketed brands across the digital media landscape. Self-report surveys do suggest that the ostensible alignment of celebrity with brand values enhances perceived fit (Buil et al., 2009), but there may be a circular logic in this supposition. Asking consumers if an endorsement should fit a brand invites a conventional answer, and there are many endorsements designed on this basis to reassure risk-averse consumers. But does it account, for example, for the outrageous marketing heft of footballer-turned-underpant model-turned national treasure, David Beckham?

#### *Brand it Like Beckham*

As an example of an archetype of celebri-branding it is difficult to overlook That Man Beckham. The iconic Beckham image acts as a symbolic point of connection for many different market demographics across the world and his activities translate easily across media channels. Beckham has had commercial contracts with Sainsbury's, Adidas, Breitling, Armani, H&M, Samsung, Diet Coke and many more, and, according to Steve Martin, Chief Executive of M&C Saatchi Sport & Entertainment, his retirement from football will increase his earning potential to upwards of £15-20 million a year (Said, 2013). For cynics, Beckham was an underachieving footballer who was past his best at 26 and reserved his sharpest turn of pace for the goal celebrations, usually jumping on the scorer's back whilst gurning straight to camera. Since his early days when his petulance and inconsistency occasionally marred his football career (including an ignominious sending off in a crucial England World Cup match), style coaches and public speaking training, allied to his carefully tended good looks and anodyne geniality, have created a persona befitting a Head of State, Hollywood movie star, paradigm-busting scientist and literary giant, all rolled into one. Beckham's carefully articulated yet instantly forgettable words drip like glottal-stopped golden nuggets from every artfully conceived media appearance. Brand it like Beckham might have become the first and last commandment of sports PR, but his is a triumph of emptiness and Beckham is the Daddy of vacuous celebrity (Cashmore and Parker, 2003). Contemporary celebrities like Beckham and, before his spectacular fall from grace, Tiger Woods, have stretched the celebrity brand into new techniques of execution beyond wooden personal product endorsements of dubious sincerity or demeaning 'you may remember me from...' brand spokesperson gigs, and can now encompass any form of media 'content', from *Tweets* to viral films and PR puff features.

The cultural knowledge consumers bring to our mediated encounters with celebrity can mean that the brand endorsement leaks across into other genres. Colleen Rooney, the footballer's wife mentioned above, now sponsors anything from perfume to

bikinis, while Beckham, for instance, starred with rugby player Johnny Wilkinson in a video made especially for sports fans by *Adidas*, but there was no explicit promotional element. The viewer could infer that Beckham was working for *Adidas*, and that was all that was needed. Consumers, well-tutored in reading promotion culture (Wernick, 1991) and picking up on intertextuality in advertising (O'Donohoe, 1997) are left to infer the reference to *Adidas*. Likewise, child-star-turned-sex-goddess Miley Cyrus's infamous appearance on the 2013 MTV awards not only introduced a new word into the global lexicon (twerking, of course) but acted as a powerful yet entirely implicit promotion for her single, released (coincidentally) shortly after her performance had generated seismic social and mass media reaction. The celebrity brand can be astonishingly fluid, as in the case of Russell Brand, a moderately amusing British stand-up comedian, who quickly became a Hollywood movie actor and then a commentator on political affairs who was interviewed deferentially on the UK's top political analysis show by celebrity journalist Jeremy Paxman.

#### *Reciprocal endorsement*

Sometimes, the endorsement itself appears to be consciously reciprocal, such as where celebrities are appointed to quasi-official positions as creative directors for major brands. For example, fashion designer Mark Jacobs moved into a successful perfume line before being appointed as creative director by *Diet Coke*, Stella McCartney was given a similar title to design athletes outfits for *Team GB* and *Adidas* and none other than Lady Gaga took a post as creative director for *Polaroid* (Shayon, 2013). These appointments might be nominal, but they represent a mutual accommodation between the creative ego of the artist and the commercial imperative of the brand. Perhaps deals such as these are less a case of celebrity endorsements than a creative artist's brand extension (Schroeder, 2005), and some, like *Katy Perry's* deal with makers of *The Sims*, *Electronic Arts*, might seem more meaningful as partnership than others, such as *Madonna's* with *Diageo* (Reed, 2012). While these deals do not rely on social media for their cultural resonance, the communication of the deals via social media is central to their marketing rationale. They drive PR and facilitate brand extensions by building on social media shares, likes and comments. Brands want recognition and advertising campaigns strive for social media buzz. The presence of a celebrity in a commercial agreement with a brand guarantees a certain level of recognition with specified target groups along with an order of social media buzz, at least in showbusiness media vehicles.

As we note above, conventional marketing wisdom may hold that match-up is essential to the success of brand extensions (Kamins, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994) but this depends on the brand and the sector. For example, according to Byrne et al. (2003), advertising agency Abbott Mead Vickers chose TV chef Jamie Oliver as a celebrity spokesperson for *Sainsbury's* because of his reputation at the time for high quality food. This may be a standard rationalisation for a process that can be serendipitous, depending on contacts and availability. Industry gossip has it that creatives do tend to establish relationships with celebrities that may be socially fulfilling rather than strategically planned. Nonetheless, one can imagine that the match-up between Jamie Oliver and *Sainsbury's* might have been easy to justify at the time, before Jamie subsequently became better known for his campaigning, not always well received, for healthier school meals. As another example of the imprecision of the match-up approach, Hollywood star John Travolta was chosen as brand ambassador by watch-maker *Breitling* and they played up his skills as a qualified pilot in their advertising by juxtaposing the watches with pictures of Travolta and aircraft (Lamb, 2012). Subsequently, they dropped the movie star in favour of matching-up with another celebrity who does not have a pilot's license but is famous for being a tattoo canvas: the inevitable David Beckham.

For some brands, the 'family' values espoused by the celebrity are an essential element of the congruity with the brand since they want their endorsing celebrity to personify the values they claim for the brand itself. So, for example, Michael Jackson, Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong and other celebrities such as Kobe Bryant, Madonna and Magic Johnson were all dropped by most of their sponsors as soon as criticism of their morals hit the press. This negative PR was not, however, regarded as sufficiently

asymmetrical with the brand positioning for Kate Moss's sponsors to drop her after she'd been exposed in the media for (allegedly) taking illegal drugs. The world of high street fashion was presumably indifferent to the challenge illegal drug taking posed to 'family' values. Of course, Moss is British, as is Nigella Lawson, and the others listed here American, so perhaps different standards apply.

#### **Concluding comments- celebrity and the endorsement paradigm**

We accept that some may argue that the celebrity endorsement research does not need to have a position on the cultural constitution of celebrity. Celebrity, it could be argued, can be defined operationally to enable measurement, and its deeper nature is not relevant in a research area in which measurement is its own justification. However, this opens the possibility that measurements of consumers' attitudes to celebrities in relation to brands are fundamentally flawed because the measurement is measuring something that is constructed by the measurement. What is more, such studies can have limited explanatory or predictive value if they ignore the many examples of brand-celebrity liaisons that seem to defy the match-up hypothesis. A casual look at the uses of celebrity in a small and selective sample of cases suggests that meanings are produced within the celebrity-brand relational context rather than transferred from one realm into another. This seems as true for minor celebrities of the celestoid world as for iconic celebrity brands like David Beckham and Lady Gaga. Given this possibility, there is a need for more in-depth case studies of particular examples of celebrity-driven marketing initiatives, and also for more ethnographic studies of celebrity consumption in order to enrich understanding of the cultural production and consumption of celebrity as a marketing phenomenon.

The endogenous production of celebrity is highly facilitated by convergence. Brands can choose to use an established celebrity, they can talent spot one for the future, or, in the case of media brands such as reality TV shows, they can provide the materials for the consumers to create their own. We do not suggest that the credibility of an endorser is never an issue for consumers or that consumers' rational judgements about brands are not mediated by the celebrities with which the brands associate. Rather, it seems to us that an understanding of the constitutive role of marketing in producing celebrities suggests that the celebrity-brand relation is far more fluid than celebrity endorsement research supposes. One illustration of this is that reality TV shows have become aggressive and highly successful sellers of product placement opportunities to brands (Jenkins, 2008; Cashmore, 2006; Hackley et al., 2012), even though the celebrities within the shows are elected by the public during the course of the show and held no celebrity cachet whatsoever before the first episode ran. The democratisation of the celebrification process (Driessens, 2013) has by no means displaced the role of media organisations and PR as institutional forces of cultural production (Hesmondhalg, 2005; Rojek 2012) but it does represent an evolution through which the marketing system is, in some cases, able to produce and consume celebrities for the primary purpose of facilitating brand marketing. The celebrity-endorsement research paradigm, then, needs thoroughgoing contextualisation in order to be relevant to the convergence era.

The proliferation and diffusion of discourses of celebrity reflects what Lasch and Lury (2007) characterise as a shift in cultural production from representation, to mediation. The consumer under convergence is well-versed in the idiom of celebrity as a media performance, and has access to many of the same social media resources used by advertising agencies and PR management companies. In the participatory economy (Jenkins, 2008) consumers have a significant role in the mediation of images, symbols and cultural meanings. The motives for this are varied, but include an impulse to aestheticise everyday life (Featherstone, 1991) by acting out scenes from movies and TV by using similar products or terminology. Art, then, becomes life. Marketing is the overarching discipline under which sub-fields including PR, branding, retailing, advertising and promotion, and distribution, link the glamorous and unattainable lives of the stars, with the everyday practices of consumers, by juxtaposing brands with celebrities and celestoids within mediated news, information and entertainment, and providing integrated systems of order reconciliation, customer service, and performance measurement. The role of the celebrity within this system is fluid, highly differentiated, and fundamental to marketing and consumption under convergence.

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